Nov. 1986 not filmed

A8680-1A

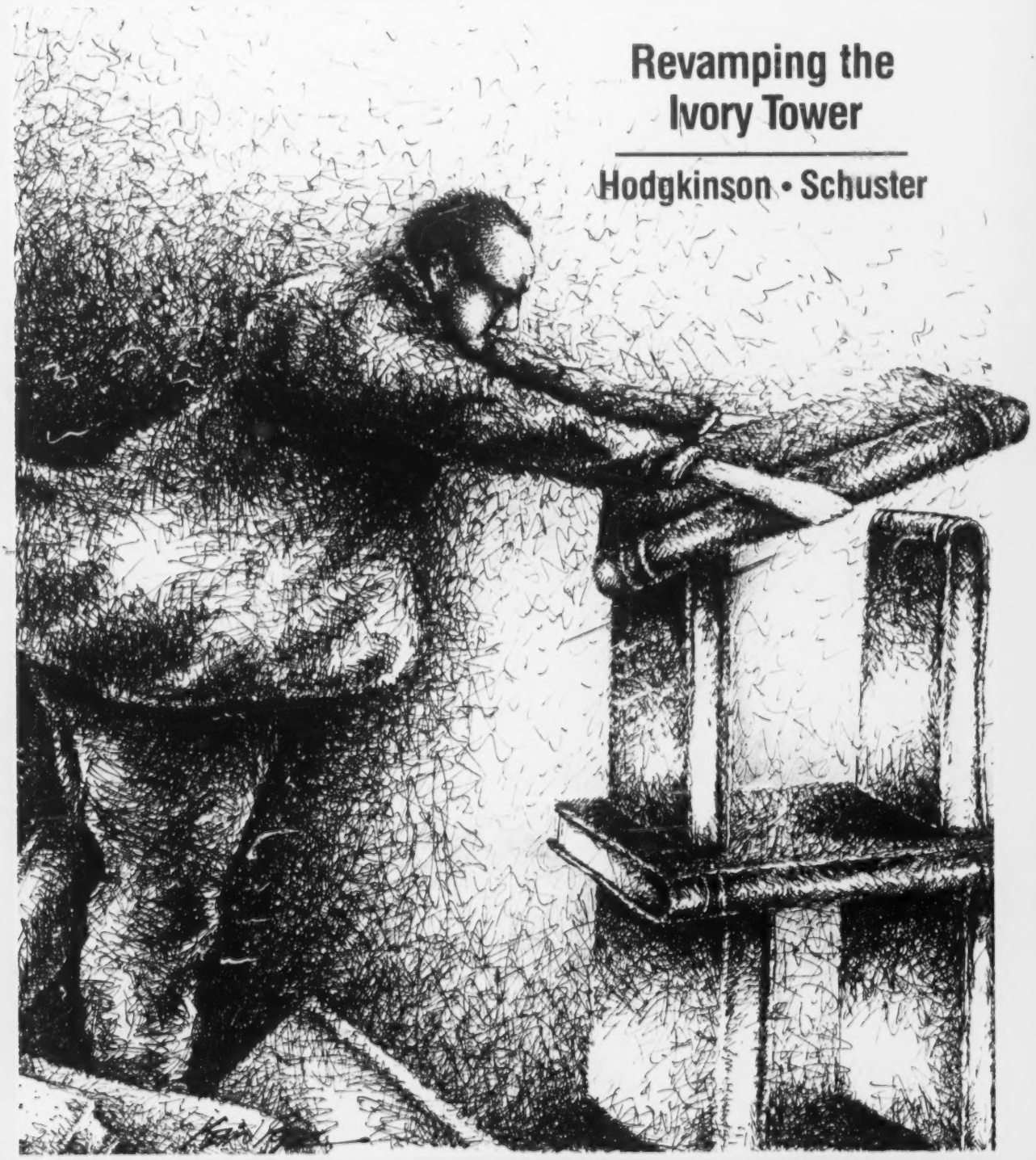
PHI DELTA

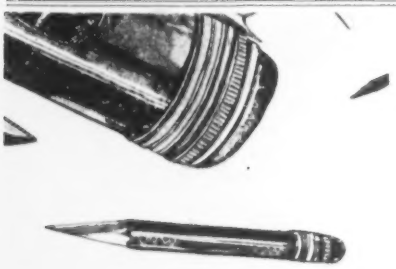
DECEMBER 1986

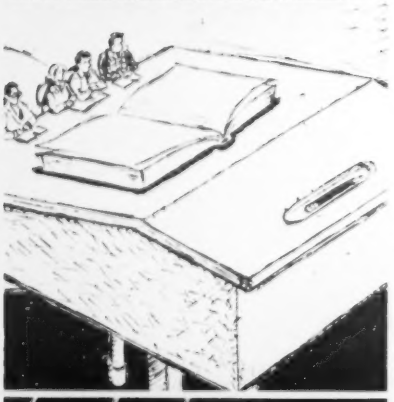
KAPPAN

Revamping the Ivory Tower

Hodgkinson • Schuster







Phi Delta December 1986 • Volume 68 • Number 4

KAPPAN

FEATURES

271 **Reform? Higher Education? Don't Be Absurd!,** *by Harold L. Hodgkinson*

275 **The Faculty Dilemma: A Short Course,** *by Jack H. Schuster*

283 **Smoothing the Transition from School to College,** *by Ernest L. Boyer*

288 **The Ideal Professor of Education,** *by Richard Wisniewski*

293 **On Sheep and Goats and School Reform,** *by Roland S. Barth*

297 **Success for *All* Students,** *by Christine E. Sleeter and Carl A. Grant*

300 **The Myth of the 'Great Principal': Questions of School Management and Instructional Leadership,** *by Sharon F. Rallis and Martha C. Highsmith*

305 **School-Based Management: The Next Needed Education Reform,** *by James W. Guthrie*

310 **The Reform of National Accreditation,** *by Donna M. Gollnick and Richard C. Kunkel*

315 **Four Educators Comment on the Redesign of NCATE,** *by Doyle Watts*

319 **Sex and School Reform,** *by Larry Cuban*

322 **Confessions of an English Poetry Eater,** *by John Atherton*

KAPPAN Special Report: States Move Reform Closer to Reality, *by Chris Pipho*

DEPARTMENTS

266 **THE EDITOR'S PAGE,** One in a Million

267 **WASHINGTON REPORT,** *by Anne C. Lewis*

269 **STATELINE,** *by Chris Pipho*

325 **PAR,** Dropping Out, *by Deborah Burnett Strother*

329 **DE JURE,** Courts Foil Schools' Efforts to Detect Drugs, *by Thomas J. Flygare*

331 **PROTOTYPES,** Meeting Students' Need to Serve, *by Timothy B. Evers*

332 **BOOKS,** *Laurence D. Brown*

336 **NEWSNOTES**

338 **BACKTALK**

Cover Illustration: Kevin Pope

Smoothing the Transition from School To College

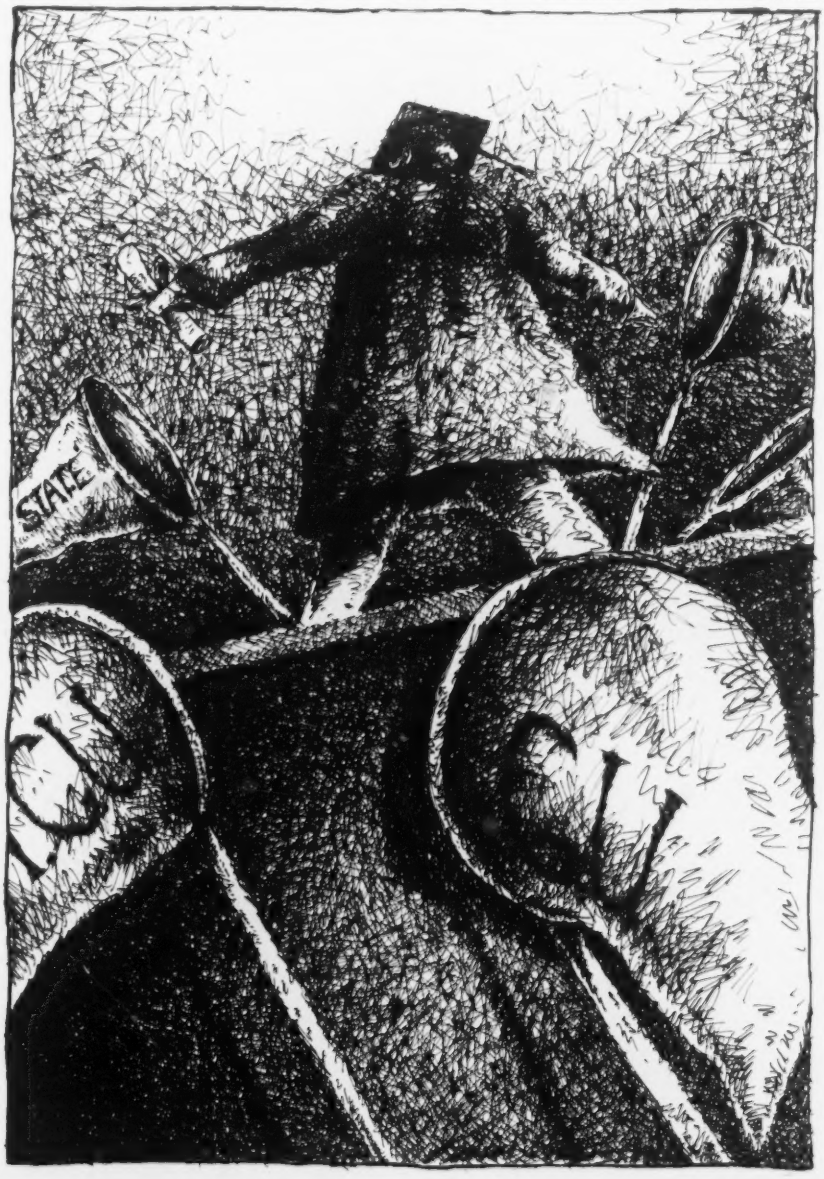


Illustration by Kevin Pope

Students approach the college experience with high expectations, but their transition from high school to college is often fraught with pitfalls. We need creative new approaches that will smooth this transition, says Mr. Boyer.

BY ERNEST L. BOYER

STUDENTS GO TO college expecting something special. Only in America is a college decal displayed proudly on the rear window of the family car. The message: here's a family on the move. One high school student reflected this nation's almost touching faith in higher education when she said, "I think my main concern is that without a college education, I'll have slim chances in today's world. I want a better life for myself. That means college."

Students approach the college experience with high expectations, but their transition from high school to college is often fraught with pitfalls and

ERNEST L. BOYER is president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, Princeton, N.J.

confusion. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recently completed a study of undergraduate education in the United States, and one of our most disturbing findings is the discontinuity that exists between the public schools and institutions of higher education. Almost half of the prospective college students we surveyed said that "trying to select a college is confusing because there is no sound basis for making a decision."[1] Many high school seniors choose a college almost blindly. Once enrolled, they may not be satisfied with their choice, and many transfer or drop out – often for the wrong reasons.

How do high school students make decisions about which college to attend? To begin with, they are flooded with booklets and brochures from a variety of colleges. Almost always these are filled with photographs of serene campus settings – grass, trees, lakes, and streams. One admissions officer told us, "Market strategists have figured out that students want to be near water. So brochures appear with oceans, lakes, and rivers. I know one college that shows oceanfront even though it is located miles from the shore."

A typical high school senior will receive information from between eight and 10 institutions. Those whose standardized test scores are extremely high will receive many times that number. The brochures will be followed by a series of letters. Yet we found that students received this literature skeptically. For example, 40% of those we surveyed said that they felt the material they received does not "tell you what is really important about college." About 40% even questioned the accuracy of the publications. One high school student who had received a great many college letters told us, "I was delighted by all the attention I was getting, but I came to realize it was mostly form letters." Another remarked, "Colleges never tell you about the bad things." A third went even further. "Brochures are dishonest," he said.

Our research also revealed that, in their college search, 57% of all prospective students visit at least one campus and nearly one in four visits three or more. What do prospective students learn from these quick campus visits? While preparing our report, several members of our staff went on campus tours. They found that recruiters often focus on that which matters least.

TABLE 1.
Type of Information Desired by College-Bound High School Seniors and Their Parents Who Report a Lack of Information to Make Informed Decisions About College

	Students %	Parents %
Costs of tuition, fees, and books	81	85
Financial aid to students (scholarships, loans, jobs)	79	89
Academic programs offered	72	76
Student activities and campus life	71	73
Strengths and weaknesses of faculty	68	75
Places to live and living costs	67	79

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Survey of the Transition from High School to College, 1984-85.

At one university, a visit that lasted an hour and a half included a quick walk *past* the library and classroom buildings. The first stop was a lengthy exploration of the student union – a minimall stuffed with things to eat, buy, and do, where visitors viewed the bagel bar, the carry-out sandwich bar, and the outdoor dining terrace. Tour members learned about the variety of services and activities available in the union – from photocopying and check cashing to swimming, billiards, first-run movies, and continuous music videos.

Once outside again, the student tour guide told the group, "Each year on the mall, the campus has a student-run carnival with lots of booths where students push their projects and sell their wares." After passing the administration building ("where you get financial aid"), the group moved on to the gymnasium. "A higher percentage of students participate in intramurals here than at any other college in the state," the group was told. The tour ended with a visit to a residence hall and a pep talk about the ins and outs of dormitory life.

On this particular campus visit, prospective students and their parents learned about festive occasions, but not about who teaches undergraduate classes. They visited the student union and the dorms, but not the library. The winning football record was discussed, but no mention was made of academic honors. Visitors heard about beer parties, but not about concerts and lectures. The group was left with the distinct impression that the campus was a place with abundant social life. But what about education?

When we asked students what influenced them most during their visits to a campus, about half of them mentioned, not surprisingly, "the friendliness of students we met." But it was the *appearance* of the place – the trees, the walkways, the well-kept lawns – that was most influential in their decision. From our many campus visits and from our survey of students, we received the distinct impression that, when it comes to recruiting students, the director of buildings and grounds may be more important than the academic dean.

Still more disturbing, we observed colleges that appeared to be more interested in filling slots than in serving students. An admissions officer, staffing a booth at a national college fair, candidly expressed her discomfort with the way recruiting is often done. "The sad fact is that there are schools that will have to close, and we don't want to be one of them. But I'm concerned with the ethics of our marketing. We cheapen and tarnish the field when we misrepresent our institutions."

Clearly, colleges need to tell their stories with integrity and good taste. They need to be sensitive to the questions of prospective students and to provide accurate information. Most institutions, it appears, are doing these things fairly well.

But marketing can become a means that drives the end for which it was instituted. As the competitive pressure on colleges grows (and it surely will), abuses are likely to increase. A small advertisement in the classified section of the *New York Times* may reflect this market pressure: "Wanted: an exp'd

person for ADMISSIONS OFFICE. Must have good speaking voice, telephone skills, and ability to close." Some years ago, the late Stephen Bailey warned that the predominant effect of a shrinking college market could well be a lowering of integrity, a decline from the relative innocence of the past. Even if only a few colleges are careless about facts and make exaggerated claims, parents and students will begin to hold all colleges in low regard.

PROSPECTIVE students and their parents, looking for more objective information, often turn to commercial guides to colleges. Dozens of such books are now on the shelves, and yet, according to our survey, only *The College Handbook*, published by the College Board, is read by more than half of the seniors who plan to attend college. One father told us that he studied "every college guide [he] could get [his] hands on because they have the most objective information."

But trying to pick a good guide – one that provides important information – can be as complicated as trying to pick a college. In addition to *The College Handbook* and such standard works as *Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges* and *The Selective Guide to Colleges*, dozens of others exist, such as *Everywoman's Guide to Colleges and Universities*, *A Guide to Post-Secondary Educational Opportunities for the Learning Disabled*, *The Black Student's Guide to College*, *Guide to Christian Colleges*, *Where the Girls Are Today: The College Man's Roadtripper Guide to All Women's Colleges*, and *America's Lowest Cost Colleges*.

Some of these commercial guidebooks report on such items as college costs, library holdings, and average scores of freshmen on the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT). Most of this information, though, is a year or more out-of-date. Other guides provide gossipy tidbits about food, sex, drugs, and alcohol. The problem is that each publication uses its own yardstick to measure excellence or decadence. Each tells the story it thinks students want to hear, and all the guidebooks, ranging from the serious to the raunchy, are placed side by side on the bookstore shelf.

But even with brochures, letters, college guidebooks, and campus visits, high school students and their parents still feel inadequately informed. When we surveyed our sample of students and parents in December of the students' senior year, half of those who were planning to attend college said that they still did not have "enough facts to make an informed decision." Of this group, about 80% felt that they needed additional information about costs and financial aid. More than two-thirds wanted to know more about academic programs, student activities, faculty strengths and weaknesses, and living accommodations on campus. Parents, even more than students, expressed a strong need to be better informed about college costs and financial aid (see Table 1).

In their search for good information about colleges, nearly three-fourths of all prospective college students seek help from high school counselors. But the advice of counselors was rated far less influential than that provided by parents and friends (see Figure 1) – not because counselors are uncaring but because they are overworked and not sufficiently informed. The typical high school counselor, according to our survey, claims to have information on only about 15 to 25 four-year colleges and universities. We suspect that this is a generous estimate. Given the diversity of interests represented in most high school graduating classes, however, this hardly seems sufficient. And counselors say that they have very little knowledge about institutions that are more than 500 miles away from their schools.

It is not surprising, then, that only 57% of the high school students we surveyed said that the information they received from counselors was "relevant" to their college search (see Table 2) and that only 10% said that counselors were the "most important influence" in their selection of a college. One counselor told us, "We don't have that large a staff, and we have all the other problems to take care of. We see the kids for college guidance when they make an appointment. We don't do it automatically."

As we suspected, parents are particularly influential in the decisions young men and women make concerning college. Their interest in having their sons and daughters attend college is very strong. For example, 88% of the parents we surveyed wanted their seniors to attend college in the coming year, while 82% of the college-bound seniors reported that their parents influenced their decision to continue their education after high school. Interestingly, parents who did not themselves graduate from college appear to exert the strongest influence on their children's decision to attend college. Of students reporting

FIGURE 1.
Individuals Offering the Most Influence In Selecting a College (As Reported by High School Seniors in 1985)

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Survey of the Transition from High School to College, 1985.

"much influence" from their parents in making the decision to attend college, 54% were from families in which neither the mother nor the father was a college graduate, 26% were from families in which only one parent had earned a college degree, and 20% were from homes in which both parents were college-educated. In families in which both parents hold college degrees, the pressure to attend college may be less obvious because it is simply assumed that the children will also attend college.

ONE OF THE most distressing findings in our study of the transition from high school to college is the widening gap between college costs and the ability of students and their families to pay. Our survey revealed that financial considerations were most crucial when it came to actually choosing a college. The majority of college-bound students described college costs as "outrageous" and felt that they could not attend the college of their choice without some financial aid from outside the family. Sixty-one percent reported that they would need scholarships, loans, or part-time jobs to be able to attend *any* of their preferred institutions (see Table 3).

The dilemmas related to cost are likely to grow. For the past five years, tuition at America's colleges and universities has been rising at roughly twice the rate of inflation – and twice the rate of increase in family income.[2] Today, the average annual cost of attending a public college or university in the U.S. is about $5,200. At private institutions the average cost is now about $10,300.[3] This means that the student's family (or someone else) must invest, on average, from $20,800 to $42,000 in a four-year undergraduate degree. For students attending the most prestigious private institutions, the price can run to $60,000 or more.

Rising college costs take on special significance when compared with family income. We found, for example, that more than 40% of all undergraduates in our college survey report that they come from families with an annual before-tax income of less than $30,000. Sixteen percent are from families with an annual before-tax income of less than $15,000. Therefore, it is not surprising that most of the high school students we surveyed reported that they will need some outside help to cover their college costs.

We completed our inquiry with the firm conviction that the transition from school to college should be smoothed. Students and their parents urgently need to be much better informed about the full range of colleges in the U.S., and they should be given better advice about the alternatives – including financial ones – available to them. Such information is essential if the undergraduate experience is to be strengthened.

As a first step, public schools should take far more seriously their responsibility for assisting students in the transition from high school to college. In this, they could learn a great deal from the best of our private schools, which have always taken that transition seriously.

The schools could also be aided considerably in this effort by the national testing organizations – the Educational Testing Service, the College Board, and the American College Testing Program. In our report, we recommend that these organizations establish regional advisement centers throughout the country.

TABLE 2.
Evaluation of Major Sources of College Information By College-Bound High School Seniors And Their Parents (% Agreeing)

		Students %	Parents %
College representatives at "College Nights"	Relevant	62	65
	Accurate	73	68
High school counselors	Relevant	57	49
	Accurate	70	62
Comparative guides	Relevant	53	50
	Accurate	65	59
College publications	Relevant	32	34
	Accurate	59	49

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Survey of the Transition from High School to College, 1984-85.

TABLE 3.
How College Costs Affect College Choice (% Agreeing)

	High School Seniors %
I will be able to go to my first-choice college *without* a scholarship, a loan, or a part-time job.	29
In order to go to my first-choice college, I will have to get some type of scholarship or loan.	21
In order to go to any worthwhile college, I will have to get some type of scholarship or loan.	18
In order to go to any worthwhile college, I will have to get a part-time job and a scholarship or loan.	22
My family can't afford to have me go away to college next year but can afford to have me go to a local college and live at home.	10

Source: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching Survey of the Transition from High School to College, 1984-85.

Such centers would be places where high school counselors could learn about colleges in their own area and throughout the nation. We also urge these national testing organizations to give grants to strengthen counseling services to high schools, especially those with low college-going rates. We suggest, too, that travel grants be made available for high school counselors, so that they can visit college campuses – and the proposed regional advisement centers – to become better informed about higher education.

Furthermore, we recommend that the Commission on Self-Regulation of the American Council on Education draw up a strict code of conduct for college recruitment, based on the work already done by the nation's registrars and admissions officers. To insure compliance with this code, we urge that the six regional accrediting associations carefully review recruitment procedures as a part of their evaluation of every college and university.

IN ADDITION TO recommendations for schools and colleges, we have some recommendations for students and their parents, as well. Prospective students should certainly look beyond glossy brochures, lake views, and well-kept lawns. When preparing for campus visits, students should list the things they want to know about a college and formulate specific questions, focusing especially on teaching and learning and on the quality of campus life. During tours, prospective students need to press for candid answers. And if what they hear is not sufficiently informative, they ought to arrange for an extended tour, asking for separate interviews with faculty members and conversations with students.

Students and their parents should certainly read more than one guidebook and be skeptical of those filled with colorful anecdotes about a college that, though fascinating, reveal little about the educational quality of the institution. Students should dig deeper and ask such important questions as, Who teaches lower-division courses? Are professors accessible? Is good teaching considered important for promotion and tenure? How many of the learning resources described in the college's promotional literature (computers, for example) are easily available to undergraduates?

Prospective students should also look into how a college treats new students. Nearly every college has an orientation program, but the quality varies widely from campus to campus. At one major state university we visited, an optional two-day session for freshmen and transfer students is provided at a cost of $40, but only a handful of students show up, and the ones who do say it is only marginally helpful. What a college does to help freshmen make the academic and social transition to college life says a great deal about the institution and its values.

Prospective students should also look at provisions for academic guidance. Who does the advising? Colleges that have a low ratio of students to advisors and insist that faculty members reserve a certain number of hours each week for students demonstrate their determination to provide support outside the classroom.

Numbers, too, are worth examining. The number of volumes in the library is often given in the promotional literature of a college, but circulation figures offer better information about the academic environment of the campus. Having a large number of books on the shelves of the library doesn't mean much if students don't use them. And how does the library budget compare to budgets for such activities as intercollegiate athletics?

The average scores on national entrance exams are often used as a measure of an institution's selectivity. But here, too, numbers can be deceptive. Saying that the mean SAT score is 1,000 actually explains very little. Knowing the *full range* of scores in the freshman class is far more useful.

Prospective students should certainly find out about the dropout rates at colleges they are considering attending. What percentage of students return for their sophomore year? That a large number of students who enroll do not graduate is not necessarily a reason to scratch a college off a prospective student's list, but it should make that student more cautious.

At the heart of a college is its academic program. Does the college have a well-defined general education curriculum that is something more than a grab bag of distribution courses? Is the academic major a narrowing or a broadening experience? And what about life outside the classroom? Is the campus enlivened by a community spirit? What sort of relations exist between the college and its surrounding community?

Does the college have a placement program that is useful – not only to business graduates, but also to those in liberal arts? What professional and graduate schools do the graduates of the college attend? And does the college also give priority to public service?

During the past quarter century, nearly all the conditions surrounding the passage from high school to college have changed. I believe that we urgently need creative new approaches to this transition in order to match these new conditions.

What colleges and universities need is not a new batch of marketing techniques that will put the right number of students in each college class. Instead, colleges and universities, working closely with the schools, need to commit themselves to helping students make the right personal choices that will start them on an educational journey that will extend beyond their college years.

Above all, prospective students and their parents should not be intimidated by the transition process. It is wrong to believe that one type of college is right for everyone. There are a large number of colleges of all sizes, both public and private, that offer a solid, challenging undergraduate experience. The key for prospective students is to know what their options are and to keep them open. For schools and colleges, the challenge is to give helpful guidance, so that students can confidently take that first step toward fulfilling their hopes and dreams.

---

1. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching recently completed several surveys, site visits to 29 institutions, and hundreds of interviews as part of the preparation for the forthcoming report, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, which will be published in early 1987 by Harper & Row. In this article, I have made extensive use of the findings from our surveys of 1,000 high school students and their parents, as well as from our poll of high school guidance counselors.

2. U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1986* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1985), p. 450; U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Listing of Consumer Price Indices, 1949 to 1985," unpublished; and Cathy Henderson, "Forecasting College Costs Through 1988-89," *American Council on Education Policy Brief*, January 1986, p. 4.

3. Henderson, p. 4. K